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## ON LEARNING TO STUDY: A FEW SUGGESTIONS

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Through my association with preparatory students and Freshmen the past several years, I have been strongly impressed with the fact that these young people have little or no idea of how to study. Nor is this ignorance limited to the lower classmen; their elder brothers too frequently manifest something of the same lack. Learning to read, as Carlyle puts it, is the chief business of the beginner and of the graduate in the university. In fact, when young people acquire the art of self-education, when they have truly learned to read or to study, they are then ready for their diplomas. The teacher can be of no greater service to the mental life of his students than to train and to inspire them to become independent of him. The teachers who can most easily accomplish this are doubtless the most efficient.

It might be well to observe that the processes of learning and teaching are largely the same. The difference is not so much one of kind as one of degree. The mental attitude of the learner should be such that he is both teacher and student. As far as the ability lies within him, he should undertake his assignment of study with the sole view not only of making it clear to himself, but also of making it a part of his mental equipment. As a rule, he will pass through practically the same steps in this process that he would in his endeavor to impart the same material to another. The main difference lies in the fact that as teacher his viewpoint should be vastly larger.

The negative side of learning and of teaching is largely the same. The weak points of one are the weak points of the other. Learning without plan is as ineffectual as teaching without plan. Cloudy, approximating notions on the part of the learner arrive at the same results as do similar notions in the mind of the teacher. In a lecture, Freeman, the well-known historian, aptly touched

the subject by saying, "The difference between good and bad teaching mainly consists in this, whether the words used are really clothed with a meaning or not." The same comment may be fittingly applied to learning.

The motive on the part of the student is as necessary as it is on the part of the teacher. It should be well-defined and genuine. There are students who are Blimbers, Gradgrinds, and Squeerses; who see just as little of the purpose of study and its value in the economy of life as did these celebrated schoolmasters with their distorted visions. Perhaps it will be years before the meaning of the opportunity of study dawns upon the student. Yet he is not a student until this revelation comes to him. He must experience his intellectual re-birth, or renaissance. Until he is intellectually introduced to himself, he may remain indefinitely in the college or university and yet not deserve to be designated a student. Until he can connect the matter in hand with life, can detect the relationship between the lifeless, listless statement of the printed page or the demonstration in the laboratory with human destiny, the name "student" should be held in abeyance. He must train himself to see the objects of his study bristling with suggestion and proposing in a highly thought-provoking manner problems with an intimate bearing upon the condition of real men and women.

In the preparation of a lesson there stand out rather saliently four guiding principles. These are not to be followed with the same deadening regularity with which some urge the Procrustean "five steps" of the recitation. They are modified and varied in accordance with the kind of lesson studied. Anyone readily appreciates that the student should really enjoy the preparation of a lesson in literature and that this enjoyment should be of a different kind from that stimulated in the preparation of a lesson in bacteriology, cement study, or in the comparative values of fertilizers. He should enjoy each, but in a different manner. Consequently, the principles involved in the preparation of diverse types of lessons will not receive the same emphasis.

First of all, a student should seek to *understand*. There is no superstructure without this foundation. "Understandest thou what thou readest?" is an old, but ever-pertinent question.

William Harvey comments on the idea in these words: "Those who, reading the words of authors, do not form sensible images of the things referred to, obtain no true ideas, but conceive false imaginations and inane phantasms."

The student should be encouraged to be honest with himself. He must be taught the habit of attempting to discriminate between what he knows, what he thinks he knows, and what he is sure he does not know. Such a mental attitude will be of great value to him. In one of his papers on higher education, the late President Harper deplored the lack of accuracy in the thinking of young people. Haziness of understanding leads to guessing and approximating, but not to clean-cut intellectual insight that will eventually be fruitful.

Life demands people who have formed habits of accuracy. In my judgment it is reckless pedagogy which tells a child that the answer to a problem is of little consequence as long as he has the principle. Inaccuracy on the part of the lawyer, the physician, the pharmacist, the train-dispatcher, is fatal. These men not only should be accurate but must be so. The social efficiency of the schools will never be enhanced by a spirit that allows and encourages the young people to acquire habits of carelessness and slovenliness in the workmanship done by either mind or hand.

The second step in studying is to *systematize* the material, or to give *proper relationship* to it. To illustrate: Everyone knows the difference between reading a solid, closely written page of history and reading a page properly paragraphed, with the paragraphs given a marginal heading. One page lacks perspective; the other clearly shows it. One shows what events stand out as primary and what follow as secondary; the other puts all facts and historic data on a par. It is imperative for the historian, whether he be teacher or writer, to set forth his subject in such an incisive and orderly manner that the reader easily and instantly sees what facts, what ethical laws, what sociological principles should be given prominence and what ones subordination.

So it is in studying a lesson. The true student is dissatisfied until he has brought order out of chaos and has given system and perspective to what at first seemed a somewhat unrelated mass of

facts. To do this is an extremely exacting business, yet one unusually rich in its mental reward. It is an exercise that tests the student's sense of relationship, proportion, and values. It cultivates in him decided habits of reflection. This will at once set him above his fellows who look upon studying and reciting as affairs of memory only.

After understanding and systematization comes *association*. In order to enrich his knowledge, the student should be taught to bring the newly acquired material into a large and vital relationship with other matter of a similar kind. If the assignment is *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, the teacher should not lose the opportunity of calling up other great "psalms of life," whose informing spirit is the music of charity. *The Vision of Sir Launfal*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Marsh Song at Sunset*, *My Triumph*, *Ten Times One Is Ten*, and many other compositions of kindred themes, when associated with Coleridge's famous *Rime*, form a cluster that will result in increased pleasure and profit to the youth. Again, when one reads Bryant's *The Poet*, one finds interest in recalling *Merlin*, *Saadi*, *A Vision of Poets*, *The Lady of Shalott*, *Popularity*, *A Musical Instrument*, all of which present the same informing idea. Then, there are the clusters of elegies, of nature-poems, of poetical expressions of the idea of pre-existence, and groups of other innumerable notions, which different poets have given their individualistic setting. The essay, the novel, the drama, the oration offer endless opportunities for building up vast resources by association.

In fields of work other than that of literature the possibilities for mental growth by association are no more limited. If the assignment is in the period of the Renaissance, one great book lover should recall another; Gutenberg's name should bring up Fust's; Rembrandt should suggest Rubens; Michelangelo, Titian, Correggio, Raphael should not be thought of as so many isolated names. The same principle likewise should be carried into questions of science. In fact, whatever the subject, the teacher should make the student see that knowledge without proper relationship to other knowledge is generally sterile and useless.

Last of all, there should be the *remembering*, or *appropriating*. After understanding, systematizing, associating, remembering

will not be an impossibility. The first three processes will easily pave the way. It is well enough in this day when teachers are absorbed with the notion of developing intelligence by so-called problem questions not to lose entire sight of the memory. A well-cultivated memory, made flexible through wide associations, is one of the best allies a student may have. History is rich in the names of men whose greatness may have been due in a measure to remarkable memories. Certainly one cannot say just what Gladstone, Disraeli, von Helmholtz, Scott, Macaulay, Coleridge, and others may have owed to the blessings of a good memory, nor would one be so unwise as to say that their work would have been equally prolific without this blessing. Possibly the popular advertisement is right in saying that one may have half the letters of the alphabet after his name and, because of his inability to remember, still remain a dunce. Let the intelligence-development lesson receive its proper credit, but no less let the memory have its share of attention. The world of affairs not only wishes men who can think, but it also wishes men who can remember.

Let the student, then, in his preparation of work feel the importance of understanding, systematizing, associating, and remembering, and he will soon find his mental efforts taking on a new interest and himself rapidly growing independent of his teachers.